



UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA

# IFAS EXTENSION

## Friday's Feature

By

Theresa Friday

October 23, 2006

### **Gardeners don't have to give up spinach**

If you've been a little hesitant to buy spinach since the recent recall, try growing your own. Spinach is an easy vegetable to grow. The secret is good timing.

Along the Gulf Coast, spinach is usually planted during October and November. Correct timing is important because spinach needs cool weather and short days for optimal performance. It is classified as a hardy cool season crop meaning that it does best when temperatures are about 50 to 60 degrees F. And don't worry about cold periods, spinach will tolerate frosts.

So, if your spinach crop fizzled in the past, you may have just planted it at the wrong time. When spinach is planted in warm soil the seed will frequently fail to germinate. If you plant too early in the fall and we have warm weather, the plant is likely to "bolt". Bolting is the premature and unwelcomed flowering often as a result of high temperatures, drought or stress.

The first step in growing spinach is to choose a sunny spot. While spinach will grow in a variety of soils, it prefers moist soils with plenty of organic material. Several weeks prior to planting, add a two inch layer of compost on top of your garden and work it into the top six inches of soil. Spinach is sensitive to acidity in the soil. The soil should have a pH of 6.2 to 6.9.

The next step in growing spinach is choosing the right variety. There are three types of spinach: the smooth leaf, the savoyed leaf (crinkled) and the in-between type called the semi-savoyed leaf. Recommended varieties for our area include Virginia Savoy, Melody, Bloomsdale, Longstanding, Tyee and Olympia. For the home gardener, the smooth leaf types are good choices because they are much easier to clean.

If you're starting from seed, be sure to purchase fresh each year. Soak the seed in water for several hours or overnight before planting. Seeds should be planted about ¼ inch deep and spaced three to six inches apart.

Even though spinach develops a tap root, the feeder roots are shallow remaining in the top two to four inches of the soil. So, be attentive to your watering. The ground should be kept moist but not saturated. Mulch will help keep your plants cleaner and retain soil moisture longer.

Spinach usually matures in 37 to 70 days depending on the variety you plant. Be sure to harvest before bolting. Spinach is usually harvested by cutting the whole plant once the leaves reach their full size, but before they become tough. But, it may also be gathered by cutting the outside leaves and allowing the small center leaves to remain. Be sure to remove any leaves that start to yellow, since they can sap the energy of the plant and may stimulate bolting.

So there's no need to avoid spinach, get creative in growing your own. If you don't have a well-tilled garden spot, plant some in a planter or large flowerpot. Spinach is both edible and ornamental.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to:  
<http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>.